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THE BAD NEW: A MAXIM AND TWELVE THESES FOR THE PRESENT MOMENT

LEXICON, PHILOFICTION ACCELERATION, CAPITAL, MARXISM, NON-ECONOMY, NON-PHILOSOPHY, TIME

25 August. A Brechtian maxim: "Don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones."

Walter Benjamin, Conversations with Brecht

1. Time has been thought on the model of rescuing a "good" time from a "bad" time, of extracting, releasing, finding or constructing a "better" form of time (qualitative, intensive, durational, ecstatic, now-time, etc.) out of the wreckage of time as we have it (quantitative, extensive, mechanistic, quotidian, linear and homogenous). Our understanding of time and of the times is one predicated on a work to extract good time from bad, to discover a form of time that will answer the problem of time and provide a solution to the "government of time".
2. Never believe a "good" time will save us. There is no such simple solution that can recover or dictate a regime of time that will redeem the fallen time in which we live. Such a schema remains fundamentally theological, in the bad sense of an enchantment of time, a narrative of redemption and saving that leaves us without traction on our time.
3. The alternative to the division of time into good and bad is to insist that time is so irreducibly heterogeneous that it can never be saturated. It is the very mixture of time, the density of times, which then becomes the good time. Certainly we all live in multiple times: times of anxiety, times of panic, of reverie, of desire, times of love, and times of hate. This is before we consider the cosmic time which has cooked and cooled the carbon atoms that constitute us over billions of years, or all the forms of nonhuman time: cosmic, geological, animal, etc. Yet, while I don't deny the heterogeneity of time this in itself is not enough to resist the great synchronisation of time to value undertaken by capital, or the insertion into an imaginary diachronic "deep" time undertaken by the nation, or the legal and political regulation of time operated by the state. Heterogeneity is there, but this is only a beginning. Left as heterogeneity the multiple forms of time become sites of accumulation and violence, posited by capital as actual or possible resources, by the nation as divisible into national and "non-national" time, and by the state as sites of regulation and registration.
4. Never believe the "heterogeneity" of time will save us. To affirm the heterogeneity of time is to remain with positing times that can be synchronised, exploited, written into new forms of value and domination. Instead, we have to start to grasp these

heterogeneities in all their fragility, availability, and resistance.

5. There is never an alternative time to the fallen time in which we live. There is no exteriority of time, no time from outside or outside time that cuts into our time, no time that transcends our time, no time which liberates us per se. Instead we have to start the work of analysing time, of decrypting the current struggles over time, of understanding the crucial role that time plays without assuming that we can simply govern that time, impose a time from outside, subtract ourselves from the times to inhabit a position of mastery over time. The project of the "governance of time" risks occupying, without the same power, the sites of all the existing forms of governance. It risks authoritarianism without authority.

6. To begin this decryption we can schematically map a typology of times, which maps a politics of time through the ways in which political positions propose different forms of time. This typology, after Brecht, suggests an interrogation of the Old and the New. For Reactionary Primitivism, of left or right, the time desired is the time of the Good Old Things, that time when times were Good (stable, hierarchical, non-capitalist, non-civilised), or even when we were free of "time" as a concept. This is nostalgia for past time that evades the problem of the present by presenting an image of salvational time. Certainly we can turn to the Old to weaponise time, but not to a simplified image of the Good Old Things that bears no relation to our time.

For Fascist Reaction, proliferating in our times, the time it proposes is the time of the Old New (as Brecht put it, "the Old strode in disguised as the New", in *Parade of the Old New*). The Fascisms and reactionary politics of the present, as they did in the past, fuse the Old and the New. The supposed verities of domination and hierarchy, the Old, is presented as the New, in the form of a technocratic biopolitics of state domination and capitalist "productivity", as cyber-culture images of control and "freedom".

For the accelerationists the desired time is the New New, a New so radical it will punch through both the present and the promised New, the limits of neoliberal capitalism, in which the New is more of the same. This is also a New New that is nostalgic for the Old, but that Old which promised the New. Here time is treated as open to a New that must be imposed, engineered and administered.

Communism does not propose a time, but treats our time as the "Bad New".

7. There is only one time. This is the time of the Bad New. That time is not unified, but contradictory, riven, divided, and in that sense multiple. This is not time as multiplicity, but simply time as it is. The task is to interrogate that time, to reflect on that time, which introduces a delay. The owl of Minerva flies at dusk. We risk being too late, not quick enough for all the urgency of all the calls to save time, but at the same time we delay to grasp the violent conflict of our time.

8. We cannot be consoled by the good old things or the good new future. This is not to abandon the past or the future, but to refuse to treat them as detached and other times; it is, in fact, to maintain our link to them. Time was never purely good in the past (things were so simple then), or purely bad now and to be redeemed in the future.

9. We should not abandon our time. We have to live our time. Guy Debord quotes Baltasar Gracián in his script for *In Girum*: "You must traverse the paths of time to reach the point of opportunity." We are in time, multiple or otherwise, there is no exteriority from which to speak of or about our times, no shelter, however much we might desire it. If time is negativity, as Hegel suggested, then that negativity corrodes our claims to exteriority, to immunity, to governance.

10. A praxis of time appears lacking, but magically filling that lack might intensify the problem. The collective self-determination of time is legible in all those struggles to seize time, all the new "proletarian nights" that take-back time where they can from capital, the nation and the state. These are struggles for the decommodification of time, not only the time that is devoted to the generation of value (our commodified labour), but also the time of consumption and self-reproduction (time at the service of the commodity), and the time devoted to servicing the commodity (social media time, etc.). These struggles are cryptic, fleeting, even insubstantial, certainly by the measures of capital. Unification from without is the temptation, but one that must be resisted. The legibility of these struggles lies in their illegibility, in their "broken" form. We have to find a "broken" language that can express these broken times and these broken struggles, as the true content and form of these struggles.

11. A broken language is not a hopeless language; we already have enough apocalypticism and pessimism for our time. But it is not our role to provide hope, to claim for the times what is not there. It is to live our time as it is, to struggle with the times, to find the times at the breaking points, to find the Good New.

12. The Good New would be the time in which Adorno was willing to work two hours a day as a lift attendant. "If the world were so planned that everything one does served the whole of society in a transparent manner, and senseless activities were abandoned, I would be happy to spend two hours a day working as a lift attendant."

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